

Autumn Internationals: England's Selection Race Heats Up

The Autumn Internationals selection process feels more like a sprint for England's emerging rugby hopefuls. A short run of just five Premiership fixtures separates the opening of the new campaign from their first November international clash against Australia. With so little time between domestic and international action, competition for spots is intense.

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This year, there is no preliminary training camp, unlike previous seasons. In principle, every player should be available to represent their club sides during the weekend preceding the Wallabies' visit to Twickenham. England coach Steve Borthwick has sought to manage this compressed window by arranging a couple of shorter gatherings instead.

Although he likely holds firm ideas about his November selections, he continues to monitor domestic performances closely. The wing position has become a critical reflection of England's game model, particularly regarding kicking and counter-attack strategies. With numerous candidates producing eye-catching performances in the Premiership, Borthwick enjoys a wealth of selection options. Since assuming control as England's head coach, he has presided over 36 Test matches.

Out of the 26 players who have debuted under his tenure, six have been natural wingers: Ollie Hassell-Collins, Immanuel Feyi-Waboso, Tom Roebuck, Ollie

Sleightholme, Cadan Murley, and Will Muir. While veterans Elliot Daly and Jonny May were heavily relied upon during the 2023 World Cup, there is now a clear move toward rejuvenating these roles and embracing evolving tactical trends.

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Autumn Internationals 2025: Feyi-Waboso and Sleightholme Boost England's Aerial Game

Feyi-Waboso's introduction came during the first campaign involving coach Felix Jones. His club, Exeter Chiefs, employed a high-intensity defensive rush, mirroring England's structure and making Feyi-Waboso a seamless fit. This tactical alignment undoubtedly eased his transition into international rugby ahead of the Autumn Internationals 2025.



Sleightholme, meanwhile, accustomed to a different defensive structure at Northampton Saints, faced a challenging adaptation during the 2024 autumn series after Jones departed and Joe El-Abd joined the staff. Notably, England softened their line-speed approach during the 2025 Six Nations, adjusting their defensive balance accordingly.

Since the tightened obstruction rules were introduced last year, aerial ability has gained greater significance. England's starting wings for both Tests in Argentina, Tom Roebuck and Will Muir, each stand 6ft 2in tall and exhibit impressive leaping strength. In the opening minutes of England's 22-17 victory in San Juan, Muir

chased a Ben Spencer box kick, rising to contest Santiago Carreras in the air before the ball spilled to Tom Willis.

Moments later, after Argentina weathered several English attacks, George Ford switched play to the right and delivered a precise kick-pass to Roebuck. The young wing soared above Ignacio Mendy to claim the ball cleanly, pivoting and cutting inward before offloading to Luke Northmore, with Seb Atkinson finishing off a superb try. These passages highlighted England's growing confidence under high balls.

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England Vs Australia: Freeman Eyes Centre Role as England's Backline Battle Intensifies

Maintaining consistency in aerial duels will remain crucial for England's wide players. Tommy Freeman, who has occupied either wing berth in 16 Tests under Borthwick, has become a specialist in contesting restarts, regularly regaining possession for his team. Yet Freeman now shows interest in a permanent shift to outside center as England vs Australia approaches.

He has featured there on several occasions for England, most memorably alongside Ollie Lawrence during a thrilling win over France eight months ago. Such a move could open space for another pure speedster, helping the back three maintain a balanced composition. Max Malins, a creative playmaker capable of drifting infield to connect attacking phases, was previously valued for balancing Freddie Steward's attributes.



Now returned to his preferred full-back role, Malins has looked sharp for the Saracens in recent weeks. Freddie Steward impressed in Argentina, while Elliot Daly, George Furbank, and Joe Carpenter also remain contenders for the No. 15 shirt. During the Six Nations, even Marcus Smith appeared at full-back and represented the British & Irish Lions in that position.

Borthwick will not evaluate the wings in isolation. Should he determine that more experienced centers, perhaps two from Ollie Lawrence, Seb Atkinson, Luke Northmore, Fraser Dingwall, or Henry Slade are essential, then Freeman may continue out wide. Nonetheless, competition for those spots continues to intensify, with younger wingers lining up to impress.

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